

Greetings Everyone,

Last week was another full week in Austin. We continue to meet with Legislative offices at the Capitol, discussing our needs, challenges and emerging bills that affect the agency and system.

Friday was the final day for bills to be filed. Senator Whitmire filed a bill last week—SB 1630—that was discussed in a few news articles over the weekend and that will have great significance for us as it moves through the legislative process. We knew the bill was coming and had visited with his office about it. Basically, the bill focuses on the regionalization of counties. It provides some framework for counties to share yet-to-be-determined resources among the 7 regions and proposes a concept intended to further reduce commitments and keep more kids closer to home. At the heart of the concept is the expansion of the utilization of existing unused county post-adjudication beds by making those beds more widely available for kids who would otherwise be committed. At the same time, the bill changes the law to limit who the counties can commit to TJJD. If passed as currently proposed, effective September 2017, to commit an indeterminate sentenced kid, the committing court would need to confirm via a local probation department's validated risk assessment and clear statement of need, that the kid has needs that cannot be met locally.

This bill has not passed. It has just been filed.

The mission of TJJD is to provide positive youth outcomes, system-wide. Our conversation to improve youth outcomes has centered around regionalization of the state system and empowering counties to keep more kids. SB 1630 simply shifts the regionalization concept of keeping kids closer to home and in smaller facilities to the county side to try and maximize the use of existing county beds, with the assumption that funding will come with that, which empowers the counties to keep more kids. This will mean that the population of state facilities would be further reduced, but through attrition on the front end.

At the same time the bill also requires that we study the use of our existing facilities for potential for re-purposing. There have been no discussions with us regarding closures, but rather the potential for re-purposing our operations and how we might develop other uses that would be of benefit.

And as that evolves, we will assess how best to utilize what we have, be as creative as we can be while being as financially prudent as possible.

I hope each of you will have a good week. And, as always, I appreciate your efforts on behalf of our mission.

David